

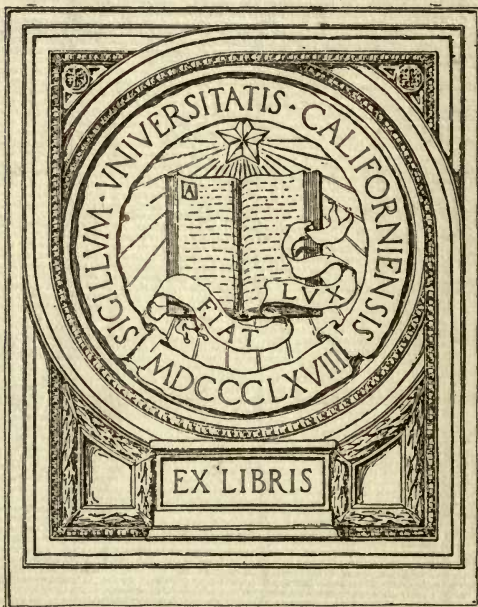
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A LECTURE

Delivered under the title "Is Irish
to be Strangled?" as the Inaugural
Address of the Society for the :: ::
Simplification of the Spelling of Irish
On the 15th of November, 1910

BY

OSBORN BERGIN

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TO THE
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PREFATORY NOTE

IN my Inaugural Address I had intended to deal chiefly with the historical basis of Simplified Spelling. As explained in the opening paragraph, it was decided that it would be better to come at once to the practical problems of the present day. The manner in which these were discussed was greatly influenced by the fact that the lecture had to be delivered before an audience which was largely hostile. Public feeling—the feeling of the small public that cares about such matters—was somewhat excited. Under a misapprehension, I believe, of our aims and methods, the body then officially representing the Gaelic League had just condemned our work as unnecessary and dangerous.

Since the time when the lecture was delivered much of the opposition we had to meet has disappeared. On the one hand it is now universally admitted that, for various reasons, old methods are not succeeding. The critical state of the language, hardly realized last year, is now a commonplace. And this leads many to welcome help where they had feared rivalry. On the other hand the encouragement we have received from Canon O'Leary, and the publication of some of his writings in Simplified Spelling, have served as a guarantee of good faith, and brought us valuable

support from quarters that were strongly prejudiced against us a year ago. Lastly, the publication of *Glór na Ly* has convinced many waverers that an accomplished fact can no longer be regarded as an impossibility. To-day there is less call for polemics, and it would be easier to plead the cause of the Society on its own merits. But I have thought it undesirable to recast the lecture, for I believe the facts are still as I have stated them.

IRISH SPELLING

WHEN I was asked to give a public lecture on behalf of *An Cuman um Letiriú Shimplí*, it seemed to me at first that the most appropriate way to deal with the object for which the Society was founded would be to trace the main lines in the history of Irish orthography, to show how it has been changing—slowly it is true—from the start, and how various attempts have been made to improve it, some of them successful, others doomed to untimely failure. Such a study might be made the basis of an appeal for the extension of the same liberty to living writers as was conceded to their predecessors in the past. But a brief consideration showed that the subject was too vast and complex for the occasion, that it was better suited to the classroom, or to a university dissertation, than to a public hall. For this reason I do not mean to inflict an academic discourse on you, but to keep closely in touch with the problems that confront workers in the language movement in this year of grace 1910, and to ask your attention to historical investigations only in so far as they are likely to help us in solving those problems. It may be that there are some present who feel tempted to ask: "What have you to do with those problems or their solution? That is the business of the Gaelic League." Well, to such a question I answer without the slightest apology: "Yes! keeping the language of Ireland alive is the business of the Gaelic League, but it is more than that; it is the business of every Irish man, woman, and child. It concerns us all, inside or outside any particular league or society, whether this, the chief token of our race and nation, is to fade for ever within a couple of generations. For my part, although various reasons have made it impossible for me during recent years to take the same

personal share in the work of the Gaelic League as I had done at an earlier stage, still I maintain that the nation is greater than any league can ever be, and I claim the privileges as well as the duties of nationality in dealing with national questions.

Let me come to the point at once. The question that must be faced is simply this. Is the language movement so far a success? To answer this question properly we must free our minds of prejudice, and carefully exclude all topics that serve to dazzle the eyes. It is not a question of essential Irish *versus* compulsory Latin, or of school programmes, or of public processions, or of *feiseanna*, or of war-pipes or four-hand reels. It is not—and this I wish to emphasize—it is not a question of industrial revivals and wearing only clothes of Irish manufacture. These things are good in their way. Evening classes and music and dancing and little competitions and prizes and public gatherings have added a new interest and a brightness to the lives of many of us. Without industries the nation cannot even exist, and it must at least exist before it can become a Gaelic nation. And last, but not least, the University students are likely to leave their mark on the country before many years. But all these things are not the things the language movement was started to promote. Is the language itself, the spoken language, still dying? Is it a fact that its decay has not even been arrested? That Irish-speaking children do not take the place of Irish-speaking, not to say English-speaking, parents? That the movement has not yet really touched the Irish-speaking districts, and has had merely a superficial effect on the anglicized districts? In short, is it true to-day, as was publicly stated six or seven years ago, that the vessel is leaking faster than we can fill it? An affirmative answer to these questions implies that the methods now used to save Irish where it is still spoken, and to spread it to places where it has died out, are doomed to certain failure. Now, I do not want to discourage honest workers. They will need all their enthusiasm. But the truth must be faced, particularly when the governing

body of the Gaelic League think it their duty to issue a public warning concerning the malpractices of an obscure body of faddists, who might if left alone actually increase the pace of the machine to quite an appreciable extent. But at any cost the pace must be increased.

Seventeen years ago the Gaelic League was founded. I can well remember the time. For four or five years we were a feeble folk, an obscure body of cranks and faddists, quite as absurd as any spelling reformer can be in these days, but we had the enthusiasm of youth and the faith that moves mountains. After the first Oireachtas of 1897 and the starting of *Fáinne an Lae* in 1898, the Gaelic League came into the light of day, and made such a stir that some of its members expected miracles. The proverb tells us that "every beginning is weak," but, as is often the case with proverbs, the reverse is also true. The beginning of every movement is strong with a strength that belongs to the beginning only. Twelve years ago it was possible—it cost a good deal of energy and enthusiasm, but still it was possible—to get together one hundred eager students of Irish, where only one had existed twelve months before. This apparent increase of 10,000 per cent. actually led some leaders in the movement to prophecy that we were near the hill-top, and that in ten years all Ireland would be Irish-speaking. It is easier nowadays to calculate the normal rate of progress. Think of all the labour, the energy, the enthusiasm, the money expended in this city of Dublin during the last ten years. I will not say it has been in vain, for whether the progress made be fast or slow, devoted service to an ideal is its own reward. But apart from the workers, has the movement as a movement been successful? I know there have been processions, and plays, and ornamental lettering over shop fronts and at street corners, and much enjoyable companionship. But has a single street been Gaelicized? A single household? Or, put it this way—is there a single individual of those who entered a Gaelic class in Dublin ten years ago who knows Irish to-day as well as he or she knows English? For that is the goal. If there is

such a man in Dublin I should like to meet him and to shake hands with him.

The idea of geometric progression in the movement was, of course, quite delusive. At the end of the second year you may find one hundred fresh members, but by this time eighty or ninety of the first batch have lost heart, lost interest, and fallen away, and the increase is now at the rate of 10 per cent. per annum, not 10,000. Has the average branch of the Gaelic League in such a place as Dublin been able to keep up even this increase of 10 per cent. ?—a modest increase, truly, for those who mean to alter the map of the country. No ; Irish may disappear from a whole countryside in one generation. That has happened, and is still happening. But to Gaelicize the Pale will take far more than a generation.

The only possible battle-ground is the Irish-speaking districts. In many of these Irish is simply dying as fast as it can, faster even than the older generation of native speakers. In others the language is said to have a chance of holding its own. But I wish to point out that the character of these latter districts is rapidly changing. At present there is still a certain percentage who speak Irish only. These are invaluable depositaries of idiom, phonetics, tradition, and so on, but you cannot rely on them for help in the future, because there will be no such class in existence. The people who speak Irish only to-day are not those who have deliberately chosen Irish, but those who have not had the chance of learning English. And does anyone here imagine that in these days of compulsory education, and inspection, and industrial movements, and agricultural societies, any child born in Ireland this year is destined to grow to maturity without learning English ? Apart from the question whether this is morally or educationally desirable, will such a thing be physically possible ? Why, the very bilingual schools for which you have been fighting will settle that matter. Believe me, unless a radical alteration is made in our methods, in a few years Ireland will be divided into two main districts. In the first, comprising nine-tenths of the whole country, English

only will be spoken, in the remaining tenth Irish will be —*understood*! And once that stage is reached—"the rest is silence."

Now, do not imagine that I have brought you here in order to belittle the work of the Gaelic League in your presence. The work has been a great and a noble one. But there is so much still to be done! The Gaelic League has now passed the mad fervour of youth, and is thought in some quarters to be slowing down. Whether this is a fact I cannot say, but I am quite sure of this—the rate of progress is too slow. Only by a violent acceleration can we hope to achieve our purpose. The time is short. We are not yet even in sight of the hill-top. We have a long march before us. We are badly provisioned. Our only possible guides, the native speakers, are dropping one by one, and at the present rate, long before we can reach the promised land of Gaeldom, the Gaelic nation will have perished, as a nation, in the wilderness of anglicization.

The case, it seems to me, is worse than I have stated. The odds against us to-day are far greater than they were ten years ago. Everything that has been done since that time to help the people of Ireland on the road to prosperity—local government, land purchase, industrial development, agricultural organization, down to the old age pensioner's pass-book—has tended to encourage the use of English in Irish-speaking districts. People talk now about making Galway a Transatlantic port. No doubt that would put new life into the decaying town, and rouse the neighbouring countryside from the torpor of centuries. But that life would, under present conditions, be anything but a help to the Gaelic League. It needs very little exercise of imagination to call up a picture of a glorified Claddagh, a new Queenstown, crowded with well-dressed and prosperous citizens, caring as much and as little for Gaelic as the crowds on the band promenade of the old Queenstown. At the present day the language just lingers on, but wherever it has been brought into competition with English, the weaker has gone to the wall. This is inevitable. As

long as those who ought to know best insist that Irish is a quaint and beautiful survival of the Middle Ages, which must be carefully guarded against the rough usage to which all modern languages are exposed, they should not complain if the bilingual speaker draws the logical conclusion that Irish is a rather expensive luxury, while English is the real language of practical work and business.

"*Quicken the pace!*" is our motto. Whether at this eleventh hour we can ever make up for lost time is more than I can promise, but at least we can do something to lighten the burden of the Gaelic host, and to smoothe the road before them. This can be done by making the language easier to learn, easier to read, easier to write, easier to print, easier to adapt to modern requirements. I say *easier* not *easy*. Some of you have heard the phrase, "*Irish made easy*," applied in the initial stages to our attempt to simplify Irish orthography. The phrase was an unfortunate one, but it must be remembered that the spelling reformers were not responsible for it. Irish is indeed a very difficult language. We can never make it *easy*, in the sense in which Italian and Spanish and English are easy. But we can at least make it *easier*. If you won't make it easier, or allow others to make it easier, at least you would do well to consider the magnitude of the task before you, and count the cost of your undertaking. You are seeking—those of you who conscientiously object to any form of simplification—you are seeking to pit a weak and terribly complicated language against the strongest language in the world, and one of the simplest, with a hundred million speakers and most of the printing presses in the world behind it, and you insist on fighting with old-fashioned out-of-date weapons. You are using bows and arrows against machine guns. Such a display of reckless courage in these prosaic days has something about it that is inspiring. It is admirable. It is magnificent—but it is not war!

What I mean by strangling the language is this. Up to our own time it was dying peacefully of neglect in a corner. The Gaelic League came forward and strove with

heart and soul to bring the language out into the fresh air. Unhappily, at the same time the League took precautions to prevent the patient from breathing. The rags and the accumulated dust of centuries were also to be carried out and kept in position. In the eyes of some of the most devoted students and workers the rags and the dust are as precious as the patient, more precious indeed.

Now we want to clear away the dust and the rags, and give the patient a chance—in other words, to treat the language as of more importance than the spelling.

† I am convinced that much of the opposition to reform is due to misapprehension of the real objects of the reformers. It is taken for granted that we mean, not to simplify the old orthography, but to cast it aside and devise a new one based entirely upon the English values of the letters. In this connexion I may be permitted to quote a remarkable assertion by a strenuous opponent of simplification, Dr. Seághan P. Mac Enri. In the *New Ireland Review* for June, 1910, page 231, he writes: "Like all those who advocate this so-called reform, Mr. Synan apparently writes from the point of view of the person who has been educated in English, has learned the English values of the letters, and who cannot conceive that a letter or a combination of letters can have any other value than that assigned to it by the Englishman." We have here a curious confusion of thought, for it is not the reformers, but some of the opponents of reform, who "cannot conceive that a letter or combination of letters can have any other value than that assigned to it by the Englishman." Of course letters are mere conventional signs. But some people imagine that, while it is easy to give the true *blás* to such a word as *ṛaḡḡáil*, already in Middle Irish shortened—and no great harm done—to *ṛaḡáil*, if you extend the process of simplification and write *ṛáil*, following the example set by Stapleton more than two hundred and seventy years ago, some magic power in the letters will force you, whether you like it or not, to pronounce the English word *fail*. The absurdity of this view is as

evident to the advocates of reform as it can possibly be to Dr. Mac Enri.

To avoid misconception, then, let me say that our Society was *not* founded to advocate the spelling of Irish words as if they were English, with English values of the letters. This has, of course, been done frequently. Most of the Irish Catechisms that appeared in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were printed in roman type, and in a phonetic, or semi-phonetic and unhistoric spelling. A couple of specimens may be of interest. The first is from a translation of *Butler's Catechism* by "Muirertach Bán O'Céiliochuir, ó Heáumpull Clúaindrohid." I quote from the edition printed "A Gorcuig san mlian, 1792," page 26 :—

"C. Créud é an nee Dóchus ?"

"F. Suaillkeas Diága, veireas muinéen laidir duin chun na beaha shéeréegh, agus na meoin le na Vaighméed ée."

Here you see a mixture of Irish and English orthography. A better example is this from a Connacht catechism of the early nineteenth century. It was translated from the English of Dr. Kirwan by Thomas Hughes, a parish clerk of the Diocese of Tuam, who was living in 1848. I quote from the third edition, page 25 :—

"K. Ke phackees ni an gra ?"

"F. An tea meen fou go yea, na yau choarso ega."

You don't like this spelling ? Well, no more do I. It is not beautiful. It is grotesque. But it could be easily read by native speakers, and this book passed through several editions, without, as far as I am aware, spoiling the Irish accent of the Diocese of Tuam. And observe that the Irish represented in this uncouth fashion is genuine Irish. I admit that it would not pass muster in a Gaelic League Feis. Any competitor who should write *an tea meen fou ega* instead of *an té a mbionn fuat aige* would at once be disqualified. It would pay much better to write even *an té atá (!) fuat aige*, which, by your leave, is not Irish at all, though prizes are often given for the like.

These little books, however, though interesting and often important monuments of dialectic usage, are really examples of a method which is not ours. They are specimens of what we are *not* doing. What then are we doing, or trying to do? We are trying to simplify the existing orthography. And to do that we want to encourage the use of the international form of the Roman alphabet, with Irish sounds apportioned to the letters. Dead letters we propose simply to drop.

The idea of using the ordinary modern form of the Roman alphabet for writing Irish stirs up a surprising amount of heat in many quarters. It is supposed to be a kind of treachery to the national sentiment, for of course the Roman alphabet is an English invention, and belongs properly to the English language! As an excellent Irish speaker said to me once with a shake of the head, "'Tis very hard to bring the Irish sounds out of English letters." The obvious retort was that Irish sounds must be brought out of Irish lips. We may be sure that the authors of the numerous Irish catechisms to which I have referred had no fear of the result.

Letters, as I have said, are merely conventional signs. The word *cú* does not become an English word if we write it *tú*. We might use the Greek alphabet or one of the Sanskrit alphabets without altering the language. We might even, strange to say, express our words by some completely new system of strokes and dashes and curves, some form of shorthand. And shorthand would no more alter or damage the language of Ireland than it has altered or damaged that of any country in the world.

The Roman alphabet is not an ideal one. It is not particularly well suited to represent the numerous fine shades of sound which are such a marked feature of the Irish language. But it is in possession. It is known all over the world. Those who use it have at their disposal the experience derived from centuries of penmanship and type-founding, with endless experiments in the direction of clearness and variety of shapes and sizes. Yet many of you protest that modern Irish must be excluded from

the right, conceded to every other language in Western Europe, of using the best known alphabet in the world. We must not use the Roman alphabet. We must write then in a different alphabet? No! in a medieval form of the very same alphabet!

What is now commonly called the Irish alphabet is not of Irish invention. Our ancestors never laid claim to the honour which some of their descendants covet on their behalf. Their own name for the form of writing in Irish manuscripts and in most modern Irish printed books was *in aibgitir latinda*—"the Latin alphabet." We have simply been more conservative in Ireland than in the rest of Europe, so that an Irish manuscript of the sixteenth century looks, at a glance, like a continental Latin manuscript of the eighth.

The first book printed in Gaelic was Carswel's translation of John Knox's *Liturgy*, which appeared in Edinburgh in 1567. Though published in Scotland it was written in the literary dialect common to Ireland and Scotland. Probably it would have been better understood in Ireland. Indeed, as far as language and style go it might have been written by Keating himself. In this book the ordinary modern form of the Roman alphabet was used, and it set a fashion which has been followed ever since in Scotland.

I should be ashamed to discuss seriously before you the question whether Irish books printed in this fashion are Irish or not, or to answer objections like that of an anonymous writer to the press who protests "it makes me quite sick to see Irish printed in English letters." This is an extreme case, which I prefer to leave to my colleagues of the medical faculty. Or perhaps one might show the patient a copy of Dr. Hyde's great collection of folk-tales, *An Sgeuluidhe Gaodhalach*, and before the sight of the "English" letters had done any great harm, one might display the title-page and the imprint *Rennes*. If he could stand another shock the same day one might then show him a modern version of the story of Deirdre, also edited by the President of the Gaelic League, and published in a German periodical at Halle.

Once you admit that the use of the ordinary international form of the Roman alphabet will not turn Irish into English, any more than it will turn Irish into French, the way becomes clear for considering some of the advantages of the course we recommend.

In the first place, the modern form of the Roman alphabet is in possession. No publisher finds it worth his while to lay in a large stock of "Gaelic" type of various shapes and sizes, and no type-founder can be expected to experiment in new founts.*

Those who would like to see Irish used in the political and public life of the country should remember that few men will be content with a newspaper report of their speeches in the words "Mr. So-and-So spoke in Irish." That is about all a public man can expect at present. To satisfy him you must allow reporters to desecrate the language by using a script unknown to the schools of the Gaelic race from the time of Féiniús Farsaidh to our own days. And after the reporter comes the compositor. A speech in English is on sale a few hours after its delivery. It takes, as a rule, two or three days to set up an Irish speech, even when the manuscript is handed to the press. For how many newspaper offices in Ireland can afford double sets of linotypes? As long as Irish is rigidly confined to the medieval form of the alphabet, it must of necessity be entirely ignored in ninety per cent. of the periodicals printed in Ireland, or where it does get a footing it is put into some back corner, and kept only on sufferance.

For commercial purposes the older form of the alphabet is equally impracticable. Can you imagine any firm going to the expense of double sets of typewriters, and cutting itself off from the telegraph system of the world? In this matter of telegrams I am glad to say that common sense is generally too strong for the logical application

* The so-called Irish type is cast in England. The first specimens of Irish printing are a poem and a catechism which appeared in 1571. The type used was a mixture of ordinary roman, italic, and Anglo-Saxon, the medieval Irish and Anglo-Saxon hands being practically identical.

of the exclusion policy. When telegrams have to be sent across the Atlantic the most devoted antiquary in the Gaelic League remembers that after all we are living in the twentieth century, and Irish is a modern language.

As for using the medieval alphabet in scientific work, I need only say that, in dealing with my own subject—the scientific study of the earlier forms of the language itself and the literature produced in it—the Roman alphabet is the only one in use. Medieval script must be studied for paleographical purposes, but scarcely anyone now dreams of printing Old or Middle Irish in anything but the modern international alphabet.

There is, however, one department of modern life in which the so-called Irish or Gaelic alphabet has been tried, we are told, with success—I mean that of education. Thousands of children in the primary and secondary schools have learned to read and write Irish as it is generally printed. Why make any change now? Well, I am willing to give all the credit to our opponents that is implied by such statistics. And I will not ask here what proportion of these children have really *learned*, or, what is far more important, what percentage of them ever acquire such a liking for the subject that, when the school course is over, when they have served their country by adding to the numbers on some official return, they can ever be induced to open an Irish book. Whatever the percentage is, I am sure all the publishers will agree that it is not as large as they would like to see it.

But I will content myself here by stating that I hold it to be educationally unsound to teach children to read or write in two different alphabets, or two different forms of the same alphabet at the same time. This is especially bad for their handwriting. They scarcely ever learn to write a good Gaelic script. In my experience the majority merely develop an unsightly scrawl which is called Irish because it is certainly not English. No doubt the complete absence of good copy-books is a contributing cause. Of the copy-books in use the worst, with their hideous looped *n*'s, are modern fabrications. The best are unfortunately

modelled on the large book-hand of the medieval scribe, a hand well adapted for writing with a quill pen on a sloping sheet of parchment, but almost impossible to reproduce with a steel pen on a flat sheet of paper. Few teachers and fewer pupils ever see a good specimen of the modern Irish hand, say, of the seventeenth century. They cannot expect to invent it, but they do their best. I have heard, indeed, of a school in which writing in Irish was considered as a useful exercise in drawing.

But, after all, most of us, fortunately for the country in general, have to read considerably more Irish than we write, and it is in reading that young and old find the charms or the fatigues that printers and publishers have in store. Now the best Irish or Gaelic type is beautiful to look upon, more beautiful than the ordinary modern Roman, just as a good manuscript ranks higher artistically than the printed transcript. But those who ought to know best will confess that the older form of the alphabet is more trying to the eyes. You may not notice this in skimming a page or two, but in hard reading, where close attention is needed, where the meaning of the sentence may depend on the presence or absence of an aspiration mark—too weighty a burden, surely, for a sign so easily omitted or overlooked—then the inconvenience of the Gaelic lettering is only too evident. Any of you who have had much to do with proof-reading know well the constant worry caused by the confusion between *r* and *ṛ*, *c* and *ṅ*, *t* and *ṭ*, above all by those terrible dots breaking off or going astray. After reading carefully one's proofs and revises and re-revises one can only hope that "not more misprints have slipped through than are to be expected in an Irish book."

Of course, there are people who cannot believe that "Irish" letters are less legible than "English." Well, I invite such good patriots to make two easy experiments in legibility. First, let them go to one of the streets in Dublin in which the name has been put up in Irish and English—if possible, a strange street—and standing opposite the name-plate, let them honestly test the respective distances at which

they can spell out the rival names in the rival alphabets. The second experiment is better made indoors. Take a book with Irish in medieval lettering on one page and English in modern type on the opposite, such as one of the volumes of the *Annals of Ulster*, and try to pick out the proper names. Readers who have much indexing of this kind to do turn instinctively to the English side, where the names stand out more clearly. It is inevitable that this should be so. It has nothing to do with language, as you will see if you have to work at those parts of the *Annals* which are written in Latin. The Latin is printed in the so-called Irish letters—that is, in an imitation of the medieval Latin script—but it is just as troublesome to find the place in such a text, or to pick out the Irish names, as in the Irish text itself. It is a question of type. On the one hand, the capitals and lower-case letters are too much alike, and too much space is wasted in order to leave room for aspiration marks in case they should be wanted. On the other, you have, as I have said, the fruit of centuries of experiment in many lands in the direction of clearness and convenience, with all manner of special types—italic, clarendon, egyptian, and so on—to draw on when necessary. All these are to be branded as *English*. The language of Ireland is too good for them—or is it not good enough?

“Oh, but the old letters have an æsthetic value. If you abandon them you destroy the beautiful appearance of the page.”

When a grown man talks like that—and I have actually heard the like from time to time—I try to bear up under the weighty objection with becoming fortitude. But it is hard to keep patient. This is no question of schools of art or museum cases. Crumbling ivy-clad ruins are also beautiful and picturesque to look upon. But you can't live in them. I don't ask you to blow them up with dynamite. That would be a desecration. But only a homicidal lunatic would force a weak or dying friend to pass a cold night in one of them. You cannot live in ruins. They suggest not life, but death. They are bound

up with the past, not with the future. They may be, and ought to be, preserved as relics, but it is the preservation of the mummy. Treat Irish as a picturesque relic and you strangle it.

I can appreciate beautiful manuscripts and ornamental letters as well as the most orthodox opponent of reform. By all means preserve them, and publish sumptuous facsimiles. But that is not saving the modern spoken language, or giving bilingual speakers and writers a fighting chance of using it in competition with English.

Just fancy an admirer of beautiful ornamental letters going into the office of a Dublin merchant, busied with his correspondence, and urging the latter to give up writing *Dublin*, one word of six plain letters, in favour of $\text{D}\alpha\iota\text{le } \Delta\epsilon\alpha$ $\text{C}\mu\iota\alpha\epsilon$, three words with a total of thirteen ornamental letters! Suppose he goes on, "Hallo! what is this? A telegram form. You mustn't send telegrams. That would never do. No telegraph operator in the world could express by his *tap-tap* the beautiful semicircular curve of the τ , or the dot over it. Better write your message on a parchment scroll, and send it across country by hand." At this stage I should think the average merchant would show our æsthetic friend an open door, and help him to get through it too.

But perhaps we may leave Dublin out of the question. Imagine a bilingual speaker, a product of bilingual schooling, in such a place as Ballina. You go to him and say, "I entreat you not to write *Ballina* in your address. Spell it $\text{D}\epsilon\alpha\text{le } \Delta\epsilon\alpha$ $\Delta\eta$ $\text{F}\epsilon\alpha\text{D}\alpha$.* Do this in the interests of history and tradition, of art and science, of orthography, etymology, Gaelic calligraphy, and Celtic philology!" You furnish him with a bow and arrow in one hand and a repeating rifle in the other. The bow may be richly ornamented with interlaced bands, the arrow may be

* This is the old name, see O'Donovan, *Tribes and Customs of Hy Fiachrach*, page 424. It is now locally shortened to $\text{D}\epsilon\alpha\text{le } \Delta\eta$, just as $\text{M}\alpha\iota\mu\iota\tau\mu\iota\text{r } \text{F}\epsilon\alpha\text{r } \text{M}\mu\iota\text{ge}$ (Fermoy) becomes $\Delta\eta$ $\text{M}\alpha\iota\mu\iota\tau\mu\iota\text{r}$, and $\text{D}\alpha\iota\text{le } \text{C}\mu\iota\text{ple}\alpha\iota\eta$ $\text{D}\epsilon\alpha\text{ra}$ (Castletownbere) becomes $\text{D}\alpha\iota\text{le } \Delta\eta$ $\text{C}\mu\iota\text{ple}\alpha\iota\eta$.

gaily decked with coloured feathers, but if the man wants to hit the mark he will drop the bow and arrow, and use the plain dull Birmingham gun metal. He would be a fool to do otherwise. Why, the Coisde Gnótha, the executive body of the Gaelic League itself, show a good example. The other day they caught sight of a small band of mischievous busybodies trespassing upon what they, the Coisde Gnótha, no doubt honestly regarded as their own preserve. It was no time to mince matters. They threw down their quill pens, shut their standard dictionaries with a slap, and launched forth a manifesto in the language of—Birmingham! The shot seems to have missed its mark, but at least it went off with a great bang. The advocates of reform are duly grateful for the advertishment.

Perhaps I have said enough about alphabets. One might have thought this was merely a matter of convenience and economy. But so far from being a non-controversial question, there are many who seem to regard it as the most important of all—the crucial question. And it is a curious fact that among those who regard the work of our Society with suspicion and alarm are several persons who have no intention of learning to read a word of the language. “We know no Irish,” they complain, “but at least do not rob us of our alphabet.” Such persons are not at all interested in spelling, but in spite of them I must pass on to that most exciting subject. I want to show that our Society is not so reckless and revolutionary as some of you imagine.

People who talk about “departing from the time-honoured system of the last thousand years” would do well to control their antiquarian enthusiasms by a patient examination of the facts. During the last thousand years there have been many changes. A thousand years ago, for example, the sound of *b*, except at the beginning of words, was commonly represented by *p*, and that of *v* by *b*. The initial changes of aspiration and eclipsis were rarely expressed in writing, and when they came to be expressed the value of the symbols used varied greatly from time to time. Thus, in Old Irish, the symbol *m* stands

for an eclipsing *m*, never for an aspirated one. The modern *Δ μάταιη* was represented by *Δμάτῃη*, and modern *Δ μβράταιη* by *Δμβράτῃη*. For centuries *ῑ* stood for both the aspirated and eclipsed *ῑ*, and even in the time of Keating, whose spelling was not that of his editors, the eclipsed *ῑ* might be represented by *ῑῑ*, *ῑῑ*, *ῑῑ*, *ῑῑ*, *ῑῑ*, and other varieties which cannot be represented in ordinary type. Aspirated *ῑ* is more often expressed in the best manuscripts of Keating by *ῑῑ* than by *ῑ* alone; *ῑῑ* and *ῑῑ* were also common. As for the use of *v* for *ῑ*, which my friends and I are accused of introducing into the spelling of Irish words, we deprecate the praise or the blame of such a rash innovation. It must have come in at least five hundred years ago, for it is very common in late Middle Irish and early Modern Irish manuscripts. Of course the Irish scribes of the period, like their contemporaries in the rest of Europe, write the consonant *v* and the vowel *u* alike, except that they sometimes distinguish the consonant value of the letter by putting the mark of aspiration above it or *n* after it. Some scribes are particularly fond of this symbol, which they use in all positions, e.g., *veitn* (= *ῑeit*), *in uen* (= *Δn ῑean*), *ueῑ*, *ueῑῑ* (= *ῑῑean*), *ῑo uí* (= *ῑo ῑí*), *ῑóiu*, *ῑóiv*, *ῑóiuῑ* (= *ῑóíῑ*), *ῑauaiῑ* (= *ῑauaiῑ*), and the like. Some of you may have looked into one of the manuscripts, which Dublin is fortunate in possessing, in the handwriting of that most diligent scribe, Michael O'Clery. Few will accuse the chief of the Four Masters of hostility to Irish tradition, or a hankering after foreign models. Yet this particular symbol is not uncommon in his transcripts. I do not mean to imply that he avoided the use of *ῑ*. In his time there was no attempt at uniformity of spelling. But he certainly had no prejudice against the letter *v*. Later on, in the catechisms and other devotional books printed in roman type, with a simplified or semi-phonetic spelling, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this letter is, of course, fully recognized.

Altogether it is time for our opponents to revise their dates. The current system has not been in use as long

as they imagine, and, of course, was not at the start an Irish system at all. Founded on the Roman spelling of Latin, with a British pronunciation, it was gradually adapted to suit the language. Improvements were introduced from time to time, and the spelling varied and altered more or less with the pronunciation. But at no time, from the introduction of the Latin alphabet with Christianity down to the present day, has there been a fixed standard of spelling.

As long as the native system of culture lasted, that is, up to about the middle of the seventeenth century, there was a standard literary dialect with a standard of usage and pronunciation, but within the limits fixed by the schools there was ample scope for those who retained the "historic" spelling to vary it according to their individual preference or passing fancy.

Thus, in Keating's time

rḡél	rḡéal	rḡeul	rḡéul
rcél	rcéal	rceul	rcéul
rccél	rccéal	rcceul	rccéul

were all regarded as "correct," and the same scribe often used one or another as it pleased him. In the case of longer words, such as rḡéalaiḡeact, the limits were wide enough in all conscience. Thus:—

r	ḡ	é	l	Δ	í	ḡ	eΔ	é	τ
	c	éΔ		o		ḡh	io	ch	o
	cc	eu		u		o			
		éu				oḡ			

I will not keep you here while I write out the possible variations, but if the compulsory arithmetic I learned a good many years ago has not misled me, the total, not counting abbreviations, works out at 1152 possible spellings of this one word in the literary dialect, all of them intended to represent one pronunciation. Those were brave days for the phonetician! Even now there must be over a dozen of these spellings in common use.

Up to the time we have been considering the spelling had been at least partially phonetic, if such an epithet can be applied to a system so loose as to admit of endless variations in the writing of common words. It was in this vague sense phonetic as regards the standard dialect, though it no longer represented the spoken language of any particular district. It admitted simplified and short spelling of a number of words without regard to their etymology, such as *arir* for earlier *aridisi*, O. Ir. *afrihissi*, *aicir* for *aicirio*, O. Ir. *accidit* from the Latin, *feapoa*, earlier *fodesta*, *fodechtsa*, *hifechtsa*, etc., *ané*, Mid. Ir. *inné*, *indé*. As several sounds originally distinct had long before this fallen together, in doubtful cases none but the best scribes possessed scholarship enough to choose the historic form.

After the downfall of the native schools in the seventeenth century, the historic system in the older sense was no longer possible. No ordinary writer in the eighteenth century could be expected to know whether *ruiré* or *ruige*, *uiré* or *uirge* was correct. Both *ó* and *ḡ* were silent, and even when they were still pronounced *ó* had taken the sound of *ḡ* as early as the twelfth century. In such words as *ruiré* the best scholars in Keating's day cared very little whether they wrote *ó* or *ḡ*. But it was chiefly in the eighteenth century that the plague of silent *ó*'s and *ḡ*'s sprouted forth. For fear of leaving out anything "historic" writers began to sprinkle additional dead lettering over their pages, turning, e.g. :—

bim	into	bíóim
Seán	„	Seáḡan
Síte	„	Síḡte
crúó	„	crúóao
claoi	„	claoióeao.

Another difficulty in connexion with the historic spelling arose after the loss of the standard dialect. Writers who had to fall back on the spoken language of their own district often wanted to write down words and forms which had

not been sanctioned by literary usage. There was no "historic" spelling. What were they to do? To spell as they pronounced would have been contrary to their general methods, and indeed, owing to the vague way in which many symbols had come to be used with no fixed value, it would have been hard for them to express clearly in writing exactly what they meant. The result was further confusion.

Let me give an example. The word for "swords" in the classical language of the seventeenth century was *claidibiu*, representing no doubt the Old Irish *claidib*, accusative plural of *claidib*. What is the plural now? Well, in the dialect best known to me it rhymes with *cruite*, and is commonly spelled *claidibiu*. If people say that a system is phonetic in which *ui* and *ai* may stand for one and the same sound, they must attach a meaning of their own to the word phonetic. But talking of "historic" forms and the tradition of a thousand years, would anyone knowing only *claidibiu* have guessed *claidib*? To be sure the *o* and *m* of *claidibiu* are supposed to be historic, because they show the connexion between *claidibiu* and the singular *claidib* (which itself ought "historically" to be *claidib*), just as if one should write *fooeet* in English instead of *feet*, to show its connexion with the singular *foot*.

Or take the modern word *uibiair*. This is analysed by the speakers of some dialects as *u'uibiair*. Consequently by a very simple analogical process the negative becomes *níu uibiair*. But the modern classical form is *ní uibiair*. Writers of certain dialects finding this too unfamiliar to their own speech, and unwilling to give us what they really say, have produced the mixed form *níu uibiair*, which is commonly written and printed to-day in Connacht Irish. Whether the mixed form has any real existence I have no means of judging. But for some districts at least it is as unhistoric and as unphonetic as Keating's own form would have been, had he chosen to write *ní uéuibiair* in order to show the connexion between his own *ní uibiair* and the earlier *ní érbart*.

We have seen that the historic spelling was breaking down in the seventeenth century. Since that time the language has changed considerably, or rather the spoken language with its local varieties has been freed from the domination of the old literary dialect. What was too great a strain in the seventeenth century is likely to prove a wearisome burden indeed in the elementary schools of the twentieth. In my opinion it is a useless burden. Sometimes it is worse.

I have here a pamphlet on Irish Orthography, issued a few years ago by a sub-committee appointed by the Executive of the Gaelic League. The names of the seven members of the committee, given at the head of the pamphlet, are a guarantee that it represents the results of the best modern Irish scholarship. It is written, of course, in defence of the traditional spelling, but its tone is moderate, and there are frequent appeals to respectable precedent in favour of simplicity. Yet even on their own grounds it can be shown that the reasoning of its compilers is often unsound.

Thus, on page 8 I find recommended “*ı mbárac*” not “*amárac*.” Well, Keating might write *amárac*, as many generations had done before him, but we are supposed to know better! Our infant schools are more classic than the classics themselves.

On page 7 I find the future of the substantive verb introduced thus: “The future stem of *bí* is *bé* (formerly *bıa*), not *berö*. The various persons of the future and conditional should be spelled accordingly. [The *e* of the future stem is short in Munster.]” The paradigm which follows is simple, but the forms given are *not* the classic forms, nor are they, so far as I know, supported in their details by the modern pronunciation. If a child says *béimio* or *beröir*, by all means let him write it. That would be reasonable enough. But if a child, in or out of Munster, says *béimio* and *beröir*, why should he write *e* in the first syllable? To show the etymology? To preserve the old form? Well, but the point is, that the first syllable was *short* even in Old Irish, and with all due

respect to the sub-committee who are responsible for the pamphlet, the future stem is *not* *be*. You don't want a lesson in Old and Middle Irish subjunctives and futures to-night, but it can be shown that this is a case where the scholars were at fault.

There are other "historical" arguments in this pamphlet that one might quarrel with. Perhaps the most flagrant instance is on page 3. "Vowels," we read, "lengthened by a glide (o, ɜ, u, m) . . . should not be marked long. . . . But vowels historically long should be so marked—e.g., *bríḡir* not *bríḡir*." By a curious fatality the authors of the pamphlet have hit upon an example which exposes the weakness of their position. For the first vowel in *bríḡir* is *historically short*! It is *Brigit* in Old Irish orthography. I dare say our friends took it for granted that it came from *bríog*, which would, of course, give *i*. But it is *not* derived from *bríog*! The etymology of this name is well known to comparative philologists. This is not a philological lecture, and I cannot stop to show the relation between *Brigit* and the Welsh *braint*, or the Sanskrit *brhatī*. But there is no doubt whatever of the fact. The best scholars of the Gaelic League have shown that they do not themselves know the "correct" or historic spelling of a well-known name, the name of the most famous woman in Irish history. Truly this historic spelling of our ancestors is an expensive luxury, which few of us can afford. Let those who are willing to pay the price see that they get the genuine article.

I do not make these remarks for the pleasure of criticizing the work of men, some of whom are colleagues and friends of my own. Anyone may make mistakes. And indeed from my point of view the difference between *bríḡir* and *bríḡir* is not worth quarrelling over. But take the case of a little girl who wants to know the *right* way to spell her own name. What is she to do? Shall she study Old Irish and comparative philology? That is perhaps asking too much. Or shall she apply to the Gaelic League? You have seen the result. Would it not be kinder to let the little girl spell it *bríir*, without

prejudice to the historic or prehistoric forms, which she may study when she grows up and enters the University? Why lay burdens upon the shoulders of children which you cannot bear yourselves?

It would be strange if the historic orthography had lasted so long without some attempt being made to simplify it in accordance with the development of the language. But before describing to you one of the earliest attempts to reform that spelling I must deal briefly with a few characteristic objections to change of any kind.

Objection 1.—"The old system suited the language very well. It was the Irish system as long as Ireland was Irish."

This is the hackneyed excuse of the sluggard. "What was good enough for our fathers is good enough for us." But we cannot live like our fathers. In the Middle Ages, when the old system was flourishing, very few people could read or write. Literature was the monopoly of a small aristocratic class. When Ireland was Irish there were few books in the land, and no newspapers. Above all, there was no English. But it is dull work arguing with a sluggard.

Objection 2.—"But the old system is really phonetic when you understand its principles."

Is the conventional system really phonetic? If so, what does phonetic mean? Take a single sound, a very common one in the language, that of *ū* in *ṛú, cú, cá, cáit, úo*, etc. The same sound is also represented by:—

1. uḃ	in	uḃlḃ
2. uḃḃ	„	cuḃḃar
3. uḃḃḃ	„	ṛuḃḃḃ
4. uḡ	„	uḡṛḃar
5. uḡḃ	„	luḡḃ
6. uṛ	„	crṛṛ (horseshoe)
7. uṛḃ	„	amṛḃḃ
8. úṛ	„	crúṛ (milking)

9. uḡaḃ	in	caoluḡaḃ, etc.
10. úḡaḃ	„	bṛúḡaḃ *
11. ḃaḃ	„	maṛḃaḃ
12. aḃa	„	leanaḃaṛ
13. aḃa	„	muṛcaḃa

These are fair samples. The list might be considerably extended if we went deeper into dialects, which after all no one can altogether avoid now, for the dialects are the language. In various dialects we should find the same sound *ū* represented in the conventional spelling by *ua*, *o*, *ó*, *u*, *io*, etc. And many of these combinations of letters are also used to represent quite different sounds. Compare *muṛcaḃa* and *ealaḃa*, *coṛtaḃaṛ* and *iaḃaṛ*. Or take the sound *ī* in *bí*, *ríḡ*, *ríogḡ*, *cíḡe*, *ríḡiḃ*, *aíṛíḡim*, *ṛíḡeḃaḃ*, *imṛíḃe*, *imṛíḃim*, *éíḡe*, *éíḡim*, *ṛíḡeḃaḃ*, *ṛaíṛcṛ*, *ṛíḃ*, *oíḃe*.†

The conventional system of spelling contains at all events one remarkable sign which must surely be unique among “phonetic” systems. That is the symbol *ḃ*, the algebraic *x* of Gaelic orthography. Where this letter has any historical justification at all it comes from an old spirant *ḃ*. But the one thing you may be positive about is that it is never pronounced as a spirant *ḃ*. It may, however, represent the sound of a spirant guttural, voiced (*ḡ*) or unvoiced (*c*), or a guttural that is no longer a spirant (*ḡ*), or a labial spirant (*ḃ*), or it may be a kind of vowel, and form part of a diphthong (*aḃ*). Or it may be equivalent to the aspirate (*h*). Or it may be silent, lengthening a preceding vowel. Or it may be silent without lengthening the vowel. Sometimes when a word ends in *ḃ* you must parse the word before you can pronounce it. Gaelic

* The older spelling is *bṛúḃ*.

† Professor O Máille draws my attention to the Connacht phrase *náṛ ṛáḡḃaíḃ tú*, in which *ṛáḡḃaíḃ* (*l*) represents the sound *ā*. And even here the *ā* should not be accented in the “historic” spelling, as it is short by nature, and only lengthened dialectically by the loss of the following *ḡ*. The early modern form was *ṛáḡa*.

orthography has been praised as a kind of touchstone which enables the learned to display their learning, and convicts the ignorant of ignorance. If that is the true function of orthography, then undoubtedly this *o* serves a most useful purpose, though one somewhat embarrassing to its admirers.

Objection 3.—"The people of Ireland are devoted to the old spelling."

In a sense, I could wish this were true. Unfortunately the people of Ireland, as any publisher of Gaelic books will tell you, care precious little about the old spelling. If they are so devoted to it, why has the *Gaelic Journal* been allowed to die? Why could not a great organization like the Gaelic League find support for a small monthly organ? Outside the schools and classes, and apart from the various examination programmes, is there any reading public, any demand for books in Irish, which would pay the expense of publication? You know there is not. Those who profess to speak on behalf of "the people of Ireland" and their "national sentiment," are either unable or unwilling to face the facts.

Objection 4.—"You want to destroy all our old books and manuscripts, and to cut us off from all the literature and all the writers from the time of Cormac mac Airt (or Cormac mac Cuileannáin) to the present day."

I must really apologize for discussing such absurdities. But this objection has repeatedly been urged in all seriousness by persons who were at least old enough to write letters to the papers.

I should be the last to permit the destruction of old books and manuscripts, which it is my business to study and expound. This fear of being cut off from our ancient literature generally marks the critic who has yet to make its acquaintance. If such a person as Cormac mac Airt wrote his name in Ogham characters, it was probably as much as he could do. As for the famous King-bishop with whom some of our critics confuse him, Cormac mac

Cuileannáin, I shall be glad to help any of you who wish to read his glossary, and the poems attributed to him. But you will find that he does not spell like the Gaelic League, the only editions are printed in the ordinary roman type, and to appreciate his style you will first have to study a form of Irish about as different from that of the twentieth century as Latin is from French. In fact this talk about the ancient literature has nothing to do with present-day problems.

Objection 5.—"You will destroy the history of the language, and the etymology of its words."

We might as well say, "Do not put a bridge over the Liffey, or you will destroy its geography." So far as the objection has any meaning at all, it introduces a subject which ought to be kept distinct from the practical question of spelling. We don't speak in order to show the etymology of the words we are using. Why should we write in order to do so? I have already shown what a burden this craze for scholarship may become. Even if it could by any possibility attain its purpose, is there not something absurd in this learned affectation which would make every line in our prose and poetry, in our books and papers, and in our private and commercial correspondence a gratuitous lesson in the history of the language? Of course the attempt fails. No one who takes etymology seriously will stop at Modern Irish. The first question will be, "Does the word occur in Old or Middle Irish?" It is idle to discuss the origin of *afrír* till you get back to *afríthissi*. No reader could guess from the spelling *veánam* that the word is a compound of *gníom*. For etymology we need all the help that can be got from the earlier forms of the language, and from cognate languages. Etymology is an interesting subject, but its interest is academic, not popular, and I cannot deal with it now. Otherwise I might attempt to show that in tracing the history of the language, particularly for the last five hundred years, we have to rely largely upon the blunders of ignorant scribes or on deliberate simplifications like those of the early

catechisms. For the historian wants to get at the facts as they are, not as such and such a writer or scholar thinks they ought to be. To those who fear that the history and etymology of the language are at stake I would reply that their apprehensions are groundless.

Objection 6.—"What about the dialects?"

Now I might dismiss this point summarily by answering that the question of dialects does not concern us. But it will be better to consider the question in its various bearings.

Two charges have been brought against the reformers: "By abandoning the historic spelling you create an endless multiplicity of dialects." "You are trying to force one pronunciation upon us, and to stamp out the various dialects."

Though the dialect question is ever with us, though no student of the modern language can get away from it, clear thinking on this subject is not so common as one might have expected. The other day a pamphlet was published with the object of proving, if I am right in my recollection, that there are no dialects in Irish, what are called dialects being merely different ways of saying the same thing in different places. Well, we shall not quarrel about names. These different ways of saying the same thing, associated with different parts of the country, are what is generally understood by the word dialect. When the local differences have become so pronounced that the inhabitants of one part are unintelligible to those of another, we say that they speak not different dialects but different languages. Of course it is impossible to draw a hard and fast line, or to say at what stage dialects are to be regarded as distinct languages.

What have we then in Ireland? I should say, using the word in its ordinary sense, that we have dialects, and nothing else. Since the fall of the native schools in the seventeenth century, there has been no standard generally accepted by the educated classes all over the country, indeed no educated classes—educated, I mean, in Gaelic—to follow such a standard. It is idle to assert the

contrary. Why, you cannot even name the language without using one dialect or other. The old standard name was *ḡaoidhealg*. What is it now? Is it *ḡaoluings*, or *ḡaolainn*, or *ḡaelis*, or *ḡaelge* or *ḡaegle*, or *ḡaelic*? Or shall we say *Gàilig* with the Scottish Gaels? or *ḡauc* with the Rathlin Islanders? These local differences appear in the simplest phrases. The only natural form in one district is *cáim*, in another *cá mé*. The southern *ní raḃamaíḡ* sounds at least queer to the Donegal speaker who is used to *cá raḃ muiḡ*.

What has this to do with spelling? Well, it is often claimed for the conventional system that it is so skilfully adapted to the genius of the language that it suits all dialects, without suiting any one of them so well as to be unfair to the others. Each reader can pronounce the words according to his own dialect, and thus everyone is pleased, while the written language has the great advantage of being uniform and free from dialect. This scheme for pleasing everyone by pleasing no one could only be justified by success. It is carried to its logical conclusion in the case of Chinese characters and Arabic numerals, which represent ideas, not sounds. The scheme is successful in dealing with certain classes of words, mostly short, such as *caot*, where the dialectic differences of pronunciation are regular and distinct. In longer words I doubt whether the desired uniformity would repay the strain of memorizing an unphonetic system. But in practice this uniformity is unattained and unattainable, for this reason. Dialectic differences are never confined to the pronunciation of single words. They include differences of vocabulary, of accidence, and of syntax. And here the conventional orthography is no safeguard against the realities of the living language. You may in the interests of uniformity perpetuate spellings like *iomḡa* and *veapḡraḡaíḡ*. But no conceivable spelling can represent both *caḡ* and *céapḡ*, both *ḡḡoiteanna* and *ḡḡoiteacaí*, both *ní raḃamaíḡ* and *cá raḃ muiḡ*, both *léḡ-re* and *léḡ tupa*. Where we come to differences of vocabulary, like the northern *capaíḡ* for the southern *íáíḡ*, the *muíḡe* of one district for the

meavap of another, only picture-writing will veil the dialect. As a matter of fact all the Irish written at the present day is dialectic, no matter how it is spelled. Perhaps I ought to make an exception in favour of certain recent imitations of 'Keating, unsuccessful imitations in my opinion. But I am thinking now of the living language, not of deliberate archaisms. If you speak or write natural living Irish, you cannot avoid dialect. Nothing else is left. The dialects are the language. Saving the language means saving the dialects. When they go, the language itself is gone. A common standard is of course much to be desired. But this is not to be manufactured by the aid of archaic lettering, or by pretending that nothing has changed during the last three hundred years. Whichever dialect has most writers and most readers has a chance of being accepted as the standard—if it can only be kept long enough alive!

This brings me back to the question: "What will be the effect of a simplified spelling on the dialects?" I cannot do better than quote the answer of Dáthí ó hIarlatha in a series of articles on the spelling of Irish which he contributed to the *Gaelic Journal*. In November, 1905, he wrote:—

"But, it will be objected, we shall in this way have not one language, but an indefinite number of dialects, and our efforts to attain a standard literary medium will be farther off than ever. The reply is that the exact representation of words as they are uttered, as far as this is attainable with the material at our command, will neither increase nor lessen the dialectic varieties existing, it will merely enable the reader to pronounce with certainty where he may now be in doubt, while sparing the writer a considerable amount of worse than useless labour."

The advocates of spelling reform are prepared to face this question boldly. As long as there is no generally accepted standard, if we are not ashamed to speak in dialect we need not be ashamed to write in dialect. And surely a simpler and more accurate method of writing the spoken word would familiarize the reader, to an extent impossible

under the conventional system of orthography, with the forms actually in use outside his own district. But our critics and opponents urge that a writer who has the temerity to write as he speaks will be obscure or unintelligible except in his native province. This objection is not so easy to answer offhand. It depends partly, I should say, on the writer, partly on the extent to which the dialects have diverged from one another. And on this latter point the evidence is conflicting. On the one hand we have the Secretary of the Gaelic League scouting, in the public press, the assertion that Irish is split up into widely different dialects, and maintaining that speakers from the two extremes, from Kerry and Donegal, have no difficulty in understanding one another. On the other hand we have the demand for alternative courses in three dialects in public examination programmes—and that even with the “historic” spelling! You cannot have it both ways. Face the facts. But remember that if the dialects have really drifted so far apart that alternative courses are required, and that the natural speech of one province is too hard for the readers of another, you must give up all thought of preserving or reviving “the national language.” In that case there is no national language, but several provincial ones.

While you are making up your minds as to which is the true view, I would suggest two points for consideration. First, that the use of the Roman alphabet would not interfere with any dialect; and, secondly, that there are many simplifications, such as that of the hundreds of words ending in -uḡaḃ, which would relieve all dialects impartially.

I think I have shown that the old system is not without serious defects. I now come to that part of my subject of which I had originally intended to treat in detail, the historical justification for endeavouring to remove those defects. It is always a comfort to timid folk like us to be able to point to respectable precedent in favour of our methods. Unfortunately I have left myself little time to deal with the work of the most important of our pre-

decessors. But I must not leave you under the impression that our views are altogether original.

The truth is that Irish orthography is several centuries behind the spoken language. It is easy to prove that three hundred years ago it no longer represented the popular pronunciation.

In the year 1639, Father Theobald Stapleton ("Teaboid Gállduf, Sagart erennach," as he calls himself) published at Brussels a catechism in Latin and Irish. He deliberately used the roman and italic type, and, as he tells us in his preface, simplified the spelling to bring it nearer to the pronunciation.

"& ut melius ab iisdem Hibernis aliisque facilius legi ac intelligi posset, caractere Romano exaravi ac imprimi curavi. . . . ortographia quidè non merè Hibernica, sed duntaxat, ut verba vulgò pronunciari solent, quod ex industriâ factum esse, ut facilior cunctis patefiat modus legendi linguam Hibernicam animadverteres Lector, qui modus pòst indicem reperies."

"& chum go mo feairde do thuicidís è, & fòs cach ele : do shaorthúidheas à chur à leitrecha Coitcheanna Romhanacha . . . gidheagh, ní do reir churtha síos & ortographí na Gaoilaga gu ró chinnte ach amhain mar chantar & labharthar na briarthar go coitchiann, & as do aontoisc do rinnas so, innas go mo follas do gach aoín modh leite na teangan Ghaoilaige fá mór do gheabhair foillsethe tar eis an chláir."

Stapleton tells us that the artificial style of many Irish writers in prose and poetry has injured the language. Their love of *cruos focal* has made them obscure and almost unintelligible. For himself, he aims at simplicity and clearness.

This rare and valuable book is of extreme importance for the history of the language. Of course the author's main object was not to reform Irish orthography. He is inconsistent in his alterations. The same word appears sometimes in the old form, sometimes in the simplified. And, as might be expected in a book printed on the Continent, misprints are frequent in the Irish part. Still it is evident that in bringing the orthography into closer

relations with the language of his time Stapleton was guided by two main principles. The dropping of dead letters, and the introduction of epenthetic vowels. The old spelling was in some respects too long, and in others too short, for there are many vowel sounds which were in Stapleton's time, and are now, an essential part of popular speech, but which did not occur in the older language, and are therefore rigidly excluded from the conventional orthography.

We may take some striking examples of each class from the Catechism :—

A. Dropping of Dead Letters :—

lú	for	luša	
ardú	„	arðušað	
neartú	„	nearðušað	
leasú	„	learðušað	
meadú	„	méað u šað	u/
mallú	„	mallušað	
fiosorú	„	fiorrušað	
sealabhú	„	sealbušað	
slanú	„	slánušað	
gortú	„	gorðušað	
oibriú	„	oibriušað	
foillsiú	„	foillriušað	
miniú	„	miniušað	
amú	„	amuðá, amuša	
úr	„	úar, úar	
docúl	„	docamál	
iomadúil	„	iomadomáil	
barúlach	„	baramlaç	
oiriúnach	„	oiriamnac	
dúramair	„	duðramair	
tiura	„	tiuðra	
suí	„	suíðe	
fiafruí	„	fiaffraíð, fiaffraíge	
guí	„	guíðe	

simplí	for	rimplíðe
criostuí	„	Críostairíðe
unsuí	„	ionnraíge
siorruí	„	ríoríraíðe, ríoríðairíðe
ríocht	„	ríogíðáct, ríogíðáct
achunicha	„	atcuinígeada, atcuinígeada
díobháil	„	íogíðáil
fail	„	íagíðáil, íagíðáil
tuice	„	tuigíðe
telici	„	teiligíðe
uafáis	„	uadíðáir
cèana	„	céadóna

B. *Insertion of Vowels* :—

lorag, lorug	for	loríð
anama	„	anma
balabh	„	balb
marabh	„	marb
eagana	„	eaíðna
feirig	„	feiríð
orom	„	orim
freagara	„	íreagíðna
seacharán	„	íeacíðán
marathach	„	maríðéac
fearagach	„	íearíðac
serebhis	„	íeiríðíð
uruchoid	„	uríðóio

In the face of examples like these from a contemporary of Keating, will anyone maintain, after the lapse of two hundred and seventy years, that the time is not yet ripe for a general move in the direction of simplicity? Surely even the most cautious may, without any sacrifice of principle, admit that reform is overdue.

I cannot conclude without drawing your attention to the fact that the door for reform has been kept open chiefly

by one man. That one man is Canon O'Leary, whom I make no apology for calling the greatest living writer of Irish. Canon O'Leary has all along refused to be bound by the decrees of the "scholars," whose methods have often been anything but scholarly. Of course it was natural that one whose chief interest was not "scholarship" but the rights of the spoken language, should often be inconsistent in his way of spelling, but on the whole Canon O'Leary's influence and example have been in favour of making the orthography the servant of the language. Here are some examples of his method, which I have taken from the first hundred pages of his *Niamh* :—

amú'	for	amu'òΔ, amu'ga
an'po	„	ann'po
ainim	„	ainm
b'ia	„	b'ia'ò
b'liΔin	„	b'liΔ'òΔin
b'liΔna	„	b'liΔ'òna
bua'ip'c	„	bua'ip'òip'c
bua'ip'cΔ	„	bua'ip'òΔip'cΔ
bunúr	„	bunΔ'òΔp
ceΔ'ip'cΔ	„	ceΔ'p'òcΔ
c'í'p'í	„	c'í'p'í'òe
conup	„	c'ionnup
có'p'cΔ	„	có'p'pΔ
c'p'í'òc'nú'	„	c'p'í'òc'nugΔ'ò
o'í'òb'áil	„	o'í'òg'b'áil
o'í'òl'cΔp	„	o'í'ògΔal'cΔp
o'í'c'ineΔp	„	o'ei'c'neΔp
o'ò'cΔl	„	o'oi'c'eΔl
o'p'ip'í'úr	„	o'ei'p'ò'p'í'úr
o'p'ic'áip	„	o'Δep'ò'p'íΔ'áip
p'ap'ái'g'e	„	p'ai'p'p'g'e
p'íΔine	„	p'íΔ'òΔine

ḡáτaṛ	for	ḡáḃaτaṛ
ḡáṛí	„	ḡáṛíḃe
león	„	leomán, leoḡán
liú	„	liúḡ
Maḡúin	„	Maḡḡamain
móṛáil	„	móṛḡáil
ṛíoḡa	„	ṛíoḡḡa
ṛáṛóḡ'	„	ṛáṛóḡaḡ
ṛeanaḡur	„	ṛeanaḡur
uaḡaí	„	uaḡaíḡe

Lastly, as a rumour has been going round that Canon O'Leary is opposed to the Simplified Spelling, I am authorized to state that this rumour is unfounded. Canon O'Leary is not opposed to the Simplified Spelling.

Since this lecture was delivered Canon O'Leary himself has given public expression to his approval of the Simplified Spelling. In the course of a letter which was published in the newspapers on the 1st August, 1911, he wrote : " From what I have seen of the Simplified Spelling I am satisfied that a great responsibility would be incurred by any person who should prevent this spelling from being used to spread the living Irish speech."

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